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| David Denoon: | Good afternoon. I'm Dave Denoon, and I'm very pleased to be moderating today's session. The principle role of a moderator is to make sure that things move smoothly, and I'll try to do that. What I've said to each of our speakers is that we want them to speak for something like six to eight minutes to get started, give us an overview of their ideas, and then we'll try to get as lively a discussion going with the audience as we can. So, we're going to go in the order as it's listed here. |
|  | So, we're going to start with Steve Noerper, then Kuyoun Chung then James Person. Each of them has extensive background on the subject, and obviously, we're starting with a more abstract question of reunification. Then, in the second panel, we're going to be turning our attention to the actual security issues. |
|  | So, would you please welcome Steve Noerper? |
| Stephen Noerper: | Thank you very much. Thank you ambassador. And really, it's a delight to be here, especially with two thought leaders, Noah Letiff, and David Denoon, are why I like living in New York City, and following international affairs. So, thank you both. |
|  | Thank all of you, because this is such a pertinent set of issues, as we know. Not only from our media read, but as I remind my students at Columbia, these are really the fundamental issues of war and peace for 2017. David has just rightly pointed out that we're to lead with unification, and we appreciate communicative support. |
|  | I would like to offer a few unification observations very quickly. Perhaps we can flesh them out a bit later. Because I believe that the unification thought and scenarios are very much linked to the current impasse. |
|  | And they're complicating factors, they both condition our ability to deal in the immediate term with the crises we have before us, as well as in the longer term. Here's what I mean by that. What we will have with the unification scenario is a divergence of interests among major powers who all stand on their own ground with different perspectives on where the Korean Peninsula ultimately will be. In many ways, that impedes progress to resolve where we are now in terms of the current impasse and the current high level of tensions on the peninsula. The challenges offered by North Korea, as the ambassador outlined, in terms of the missile and the nuclear development and the rapidity of that technological development and its evolution will necessarily condition where things are with unification. |
|  | Now, unification is probably not a word that you have seen much in media reporting. Certainly not in the current 18 months of really intense step-up in tensions in the region. There has been one major address by the current president, Moon Jae-In, in Berlin, which is well worth your looking for. Because he outlines in very astute ways, a means of going forward. His address in Berlin, talking about unification, was also an effort to de-escalate the tensions that we see right now. |
|  | It was, in the opinion of some observers, a last step before talk of military strikes, etc, gathers steam. So, it's important and it behooves us to listen to the South Korean leadership and voice on this because it's a very clear statement of where Moon Jae-In and the current South Korean government feels we can go. |
|  | The divergence of interests. Right now, we're at a state of impasse with North Korea. Meaning, the United States and North Korea. This is the primary predicament for US foreign policy as handed over from the Obama administration to the Trump administration. Bar none, currently defined as a chief national security concern. |
|  | Where we are in terms of the alarm around the rapid nuclear and missile development, is such that we've seen this volley of missiles. We've seen missiles over Japan. We've seen the [miniturization 00:04:34], we've seen re-entry technology, and now we are faced with a fact that we have a nuclear North Korea, for better want of a word. Even though the nations don't want to recognize it as a nuclear state, de facto, that's what we're dealing with. |
|  | So, in terms of the unification challenge, where do we go in terms of this de-nuclearization issue? Because isn't part of our view of a unified Korean Peninsula to be a nuclear free zone? To be a non-nuclear, united Korea? So, in that sense, it's very much part and parcel of the unification question. |
|  | A second aspect is the divergence of interest. So, right now, in terms of the current impasse, while we have had unanimity in the security council in terms of these resolutions, it does not look like there will be further support in the near term, by China nor by Russia. They play actually different roles. I want to make that very clear because that will also come in to play in the unification scenario. So, China and Russia both traditional allies of North Korea, don't feel that there should be a further step-up to address the current concerns. They have, though, been supportive of the most recent measures. |
|  | North Korea doesn't feel, in the current impasse, that it is interested in negotiating away its capability. In essence, we have a divergence of strategic perspectives. So, you have a North Korea that's looking for legitimacy, that is arguing that it needs deterrents against the superior US and ROK forces. You have a Moscow that can play the role of a spoiler in terms of trying to intercede when it's convenient. But, with the current state of poor US-Russia relations, is not willing to go further to help. Whereas, in a normal US-Russia relationship, we could be talking about cooperation on North Korea as we look towards unification. |
|  | And the third aspect of China, is that we seem to be comfortable to say that China has the solution here. We put all the eggs in the China basket. In my argument, we should stop looking at the Korean Peninsula strictly through the Sino-US lens, which is the primary lens that we do look at Korean Peninsular affairs, and we need to be specific with China. |
|  | So, there are roles that China and Russia can play, both in terms of immediate crisis management, and as we step towards unification, at least as outlined by the current administration. |
|  | The secretary general has used his good office to call for greater cooperation and coordination among the great powers. China, Russia, and the United States. |
|  | Lastly, Japan, which is the other regional actor I've not mentioned. Clearly, there, we have a conservative administration that may be reinforced with Abe's reelection on the 22nd. That has conservative instincts necessarily born of the flyovers of the missiles, and the level of fear now, in Japan, about what that has meant. But we also have, in the longer term, questions of where Japan lies relative to its unification perspective. |
|  | So, you have to ask yourself, and I'll close on this, which nations feel that a divided Korean Peninsula and the persistence of the status quo is in their interest? Well, there's a lot of arguments that almost all nations favor that because that's a strategic buffer for China. It provides a convenience for Russia, etc. But, if there is common agreement in terms of a movement towards unification, and if there is combinations over time, it will require a recalibration and a refocus from the different capitols. Because, right now, it's not at all clear that a united peninsula is something, despite official pronouncement, that they firmly grasp. |
|  | So, I would just like to end on that. Trying to remember that unification is part and parcel of this current strategic predicament that we're in. And to try to seek solutions in terms of negotiation, seek solutions in terms of de-escalation. Perhaps seek a moratorium, but also remember that, for the North Koreans, they'll want something, and the developmental context that comes with unification, whether that's economic assistance, infrastructure, energy, and other types of development, are the things that the international community will have to work on together. So, there may be, in the end, an out in terms of the negotiation process by taking a longer-term view of unification and steps forward in terms of integration on the Korean Peninsula. |
| David Denoon: | Thank you, Steve. Kuyoun? |
| Kuyoun Chung: | Thank you for having me here today, and I'm really honored to have an opportunity to make a position for unification. So, basically, today, I will discuss more about South Korea's position on unification and deliver how it will actually affect the prospect of unifications vis-a-vis diverging our relationship and diverging our interest with other countries. |
|  | So, basically, South Korea's unification policy has been based on 1989 National Community Unification Formula. Even though there has been many ups and downs and many changes in administrations, this formula has been kind of inherited consistently from administration to administration. Current Moon Jae-In administration also shared this view of National Community Unification Formula. |
|  | So, basically, this formula argues that there should be three stage, [inaudible 00:10:22] there's a gradual process of unification which is consists of reconciliation between two Koreas, confederation stage, which means that peaceful coexistence of two Koreas, then gradually moving into a unification stage. |
|  | So, there should be three stages, functionalist, and gradual process of unification. That has been kind of big idea of South Korea that has been inherited for more than 30 years. So, when Jae-In administration also inherited that, and recently he mentions also, Stephen mentions about it, his idea of unification is more toward de-escalating this current tensions in Korean Peninsula. Basic idea is that improving inter-Korean relationship, in spite of this nuclear crisis, improving inter-Korean relationship might help to de-escalate and create some opportunity for diplomatic solutions of de-nuclearizations. At the same time, de-escalation might pave a way to reconciliation which is a first stage of unification formula. |
|  | At the same time, it will create more peaceful environment. We can build a unification process. In other words, it's not just about inter-Korean relationship, but North East Asia in general, there should be a more supportive environment that every members in North East Asia has to be agreed with this peaceful unification idea. |
|  | That is the Moon Jae-In administration's idea which is actually conflicting with Trump administration's current North Korea policy. So, Trump Administration's policy is not necessarily about unification. It's more about North Korea policy. Especially, specific to de-nuclearization process, which is termed as "Maximum pressure and engagement." |
|  | The problem is, "Maximum Pressure and Engagement" does not necessarily mean more military solutions. All options are on the table, but at the same time, the priority has been given to diplomatic solutions. The difference between South Korea and the United States is that South Korea has been more towards appeasing North Korea to get into the table. United States is more toward course of actions and change their view and policy options to de-nuclearization. The problem is, North Korea's motivations behind this nuclear test and ballistic missiles test. |
|  | Basically, North Korea's motivation is not about peaceful unification. They have their own idea of unifications, which is totally different from the National Community's Formula that has been inherited in South Korea. The reason why they develop nuclear weapons is to make their regime survive, and at the same time, make more hospitable environment for their unification on their own terms. |
|  | So, given that three country's conflicting ideas about nuclear weapons, at the same time, unifications. It is creating more pessimistic prospect for peaceful unification. So, basically, it is important to understand that when it comes to de-nuclearizations, there has been diverging interests and diverging strategies among these six countries around the Korean Peninsula. |
|  | At the same time, when it comes to unifications, it is totally different understanding for six countries as well. So, unifications and de-nuclearizations is totally different end state, and totally different policy objectives. Each of these six countries have different ideas. The thing is, the good thing is, as North Korea's nuclear capabilities and ballistic launch capabilities is increasing and more provocative, the disparity between these six countries' ideas is kind of narrowing down. But still, even though it is narrowing down, that does not mean that there is a consensus about how we can de-nuclearize North Korea, and how we can create more good environment for unification. |
|  | So, considering all of these factors, the thing is, from South Korea's perspective, the end state in South Korea, or Korean Peninsula, is that there will be two hostile Koreas which do not share any views on formula of unification. There is a nuclear North Korea which does not [inaudible 00:15:15] they only care about United States relationship. |
|  | South Korea's perspective is pretty imperative. It's not like we are achieving unification in the short term or in the long term, given that there is a nuclear North Korea, but at the same time, this North East Asia secure landscape will be more inhospitable, and more toward the geopolitical conflict. |
|  | So, the solution to get over this security conundrum is to make, to change North Korea's mind. Whatever the solution would be, to change their mind to de-nuclearize, and at the same time, narrow the gap between these six countries' interests when it comes to unification at the same time. I'll stop here. |
| David Denoon: | Thank you Kuyoun. James? |
| James Person: | Thank you to the Foreign Policy Association, to [Kinou 00:16:14]. Ambassador Kim, lovely to see you. |
|  | I'm a historian. I get a little uncomfortable when it comes to making predictions. So, I think I'm instead going to take stock of where we are, some of the challenges that are presently provided by key stakeholders. For the sake of time, though, I'm going to focus on just the DPRK, on China, on the ROK and the US. |
|  | Well, despite our hopes, the actual prospects of near-term unification seem as distant as ever. Achieving the goal of unification will require overcoming major obstacles, the least of which, is the fact, that was already alluded to, that there is no common North-South Korean vision for what a unified Korean state would look like. |
|  | While North Korea did propose, starting in 1960, a Confederal system, of some sort. This is at a time when the North Korean economy was doing much better than that of South Korea. This concept of a confederation shifted over time. |
|  | In 1971 it was proposed again by the North Koreans, at a time when the economies were roughly equal, although South Korea was already pulling ahead. |
|  | But, by 1991, when the North Koreans again proposed this confederation system, it was really to stave off absorption. This is, to remind you, just after Germany. West Germany absorbed East Germany. |
|  | Today, I think it is pretty clear that North Korea would not accede to its own demise and absorption. The DPRK presents another obstacle with, as Steven mentioned, the nuclear program. |
|  | I do disagree with those, and you hear this a lot in Washington, particularly among Defense Department circles, that the nuclear program is really designed to provide a shield behind which North Korea will divide the US-ROK alliance, and force the US off the peninsula, and then carry out unification on its own terms. I disagree with this, because I think there's just too much history to call up on to support the idea that there is, for North Korea, to their mind at least, an incredible defensive rationale behind their pursuit of a nuclear program. |
|  | It really goes back to the early 60s when they determined that the Soviet Union, which provided a nuclear umbrella for Pyongyang, was not credible, and that they needed to take their own national defense in their own hands, and this has been something that has been reinforced over the years. This view of the world as being inherently predatory and maligned was extended not just towards the perceived foe, the United States, but even toward their allies, the Soviet Union, and China. |
|  | China is another obstacle. China will not do our bidding and bring North Korea to its knees, to force them back to the negotiating table. They won't do anything to destabilize North Korea. You often hear, because of the refugee crisis, I don't think that's the major issue. The Chinese can handle a refugee crisis. |
|  | Now, the concern of increasing the population of ethnic Koreans in North East China is a concern because of the potential for this irredentist claim to territory that even Mao Zedong recognized was traditionally Korean. It's fascinating to see conversations between Mao and Kim Il-Sung, for example, when Mao would even say, "Well, traditionally, this was Korean territory." And even suggested that, at some point, Korea could manage the territory. |
|  | But, China, I think, doesn't want a nuclear North Korea, but even more than that, it doesn't want a unified Korean Peninsula that is a treaty ally of the United States. It doesn't want a treaty ally of the United States at its doorstep at a time when China is re-asserting its traditional hegemony in the region. It's trying to create this zone of deference, where countries on its border do not do anything to upset or to challenge Beijing's regional interests. |
|  | Wanted to spend ... I'm really troubled by some of the discussion I hear about the Finlandization of the Korean Peninsula. |
|  | I first heard this a couple of years ago from a Russian scholar. But, I'm hearing it now, even in the US. Talking about a grand bargain between the US and China to neutralize the Korean Peninsula as a way of bringing about unification. This is troubling, I think, because ... just another justification for Koreans thinking of themselves as the shrimp among whales. It would be another historical injustice where Korea lost its sovereignty because of big powers, was divided because of big powers. We cannot let big powers, then to decide that the Koreas will be "neutralized" to bring about unification. I mean, especially when a not-aligned Korea would then, its fate would be in the hands of a hegemonic China. When you look at the history of Korea's relations with China going aback to the dynasties and then, more recently, China's relationship with North Korea, I can tell you this is the last thing that would be in the interests of the Koreans. |
|  | For the ROK, I think, what we're seeing with President Moon's policies is a vast improvement over what we saw with President Park. President Park, I have to say, there was some benefit to her policy of talking about the benefits of national unification, though I think it was a surprise even to her Minister of Unification at the time, that she used the term "bonanza" to describe unification. But, it was good to highlight the benefits of unification, because you have the younger generation in Korea that doesn't have direct family ties, or even memories of family or a unified Korean state. So, there was a real benefit to that. |
|  | However, I feel that the government was, in some ways creating this narrative, or constructing a narrative of imminent collapse in North Korea with these stories of high-level defectors coming across the border, and each one of these being in the press. This is something that had happened consistently, but these defectors were instead being shuffled into the National Intelligence ... uh, NIS .. National Intelligence Services think tank, where they were being used to learn about what was going on inside the regime. But, instead they were being exploited to show that collapse was imminent and this only served to antagonize the north. To really push us further away from Stage One of this unification strategy of 1989 which is reconciliation. |
|  | President Moon, I think, is doing a much better job of that. He's really trying to improve inter-Korean relations, trying to get us back on track to reconciliation, to stage one. This is necessary to overcome the tremendous differences between North and South Korea. Economic differences, cultural differences. Without communication, without contact, when unification does happen, it can be extremely challenging. |
|  | The major challenge for President Moon right now is the tough relationship, or the tense and worsening relationship between the United States and North Korea. I think, the US, we can say, with some certainty that the United States remains committed to unification. This is a priority. We fully support unification of Korea, but certainly the growing conflict, personal, in many ways, conflict between President Trump and Kim Jong-Un is not doing anything to help President Moon achieve his goals. Thank you. |
| David Denoon: | Okay. We have roughly half an hour. We're going to go a little bit after six o'clock for this discussion. So, I think we should be able to get a broad range of questions out. |
|  | But, my first admonition, please, is ask a question. Don't give a speech. If you have a question, raise your hand, and I'll call on you, and we'll get started. Right here. Would you please stand and identify yourself? |
| Rick Armstrong: | My name is Rick Armstrong. I teach and Kingsborough Community College. I was just wondering if you have any insights on the leadership of North Korea. It's the great mystery. Do any of you know anything that we don't know through the media? |
| Kuyoun Chung: | I don't think there is actually formal informations about it. The official position is that there is Kim Jong-Un, in North Korean leadership and that's it. Yeah. |
| Stephen Noerper: | The question is, what are we not reading, what do we not know. A few different things. |
|  | One is, and this is reinforced in a lunch I had with a North Korean yesterday, who is very close to the foreign minister and very close to the Head of the State Council on Foreign Affairs, the former Foreign Minister. And as I listened for well over an hour of his analysis of the current leadership dynamics, I walked away from it, in a sentence or two, saying that it is very split. There is a great deal of elite factionalism in North Korea. That can be both an advantage and disadvantage to us. Clearly, despite all of the focus on the consolidation of power under the young leader, under Kim Jong-Un, there is a reason why he's needing to continue to appear to consolidate, right? |
|  | You can look at things like the naming of his sister to the polit bureau as evidence of his further ability to consolidate, but, from all reports, if you look at 140-150 people purge, there may be pockets of resentment. Clearly, in terms of the way that the North Korean leadership has historically developed, there's a lot of vertical structure and there's a lot of stove-piping. That means you have rivalries and interests, and there's contests to please the young leader. |
|  | On the good side, that means that there may be opportunities to create in-roads, and there may be pockets of resentment that become more apparent over time. The negative of that is it creates a level of instability. So, we don't know, for example, in terms of nuclear control, command and control structures, exactly what it looks like. We do know that about three weeks ago, there were reports that in Pyongyang, there was a meeting to reinforce command and control protocol. What that might say is, they're simply reinforcing their structure. |
|  | What that says to me as a political scientist is, there was a problem there. There's a problem in the structure and there can be levels of competition. So, we need to be careful not to just think it's one guy, sitting there, calling all the shots, despite the KCNA, the official state media pronouncements and all the imagery with all the tests that go with it. It's much more nuanced. What we have a problem with, as Americans, since the focus on this group is on US policy, is we really don't have good inroads with North Korean leadership. That's problematic. We need to try to open those dialogues, open hotlines, and open dialogues with as many levels as we possibly can across senior North Korea society. |
| Kuyoun Chung: | When it comes to leadership, I add more comments after Steven, is that after several weeks ago, there has been announcement from North Korean governments that there is enforcement of his leadership, and basically his leadership is supported by [inaudible 00:30:17], which is blood-inherited leadership from his grandfathers. Even though there has been competing interest and conflicting interests inside bureaucrats and number of executive branches, there has been coherencies when it comes to North Korean leadership. That cannot be really dominantly disrupted by any type of interest. |
|  | So, even though there has been many hints that there will be some kind of conflict of interest from upper level and down level, of course there is diverging interest. It is not just limited to North Korea, but any countries have that kind of diverging interests as well. |
|  | When we talk to North Korean people, even though not just during these days, lower level officials, working level officials are pretty workable when we discuss any issues, especially like development assistance, or humanitarian aid, they are really workable and approachable, and they are willing to cooperate with others. |
|  | There is a kind of diversity. That might mean diversity, but at the same time, even though they have conflicting interests, the bottom line is that they follow the Kim Jong-Un leadership, which is based on their blood-inherited leaderships. |
| James Person: | Monolithic, ideological system, which was established in 1967 by his grandfather, Kim Il-Sung, who didn't really brook criticism well, and talk debate and discussion within the party, not as a strength or something that strengthens decisions, but would challenge the national security imperatives of the leader. |
|  | I think we're looking at the same ... |
| David Denoon: | In the back. |
| Andy Lau: | Good evening, Andy Lau from Young Professionals in Foreign Policy. Thank you all for being here and for your remarks. I wanted to ask, I think, all of us were shocked and saddened, that watch North Korea, in what happened to Otto Warmbier. I just wanted to [inaudible 00:32:22], are there any broader strategic implications, given that the brutality of the regime was on such unique display for the world to see. Thank you. |
| David Denoon: | Steve. |
| Stephen Noerper: | Yes. I think, the tragedy around Otto Warmbier is such that it has moved everyone in this country. At the popular level, and at the special interest and scholarly and official levels. |
|  | You know, to be extremely dismayed by that type of behavior, and to think about the potential as his family has recently said, for torture as well. There are demands for accountability. I would emphasize that we shouldn't move away from those demands for accountability. |
|  | Because we're supposed to talk about unification aspects, I would venture to say that there will be larger questions about accountability in the future. Otto Warmbier, if this can happen to an American, you can imagine what happens to North Koreans in the gulag within North Korea. Whether that's 120 or 140 thousand. Do look at the 2014 United Nation Commission of Inquiry Report, but we know that they compared it to Nazi-era atrocities. And so, it behooves us all, as much as we talk about nuclear and missile issues, to remember there's a broader question of human rights. When it comes to unification and what South Korea will have to manage, the question of transitional justice and accountability will be high. There is currently a United Nations center working in Seoul to document the atrocities of the North Korean regime. |
| David Denoon: | Over here. On the right. Could you wait for the mic, please? |
| Jonathan: | Yes, you know, one of the things that it took a long time in Germany ... |
| David Denoon: | Could you identify yourself, please? |
| Jonathan: | Oh. Sorry. Jonathan [Oneg 00:34:18]. The, was the question of what was actually going to be the out-of-pocket, was going to be the impact on West Germany. My question to you is, is the same debate occurring in South Korea? Do people have a sense of the size of what would be involved, and whether there is domestic appetite for doing that? |
| Kuyoun Chung: | When it comes to unificiations ... so, basically, there has been ... every year, we kind of make a poll about what do you think about unificiations? And there has been three different types of responses in South Korea. More recent observation is that younger generations are identified as isolationists. In other words, they do not really care about unification. Not because they have really big connection to North Korean people. But because they have not really experienced Korean wars, and they did not really have direct contact to North Korean people. Given that there is economic stagnation, and there is more, they have more priority of economic- getting a job and economic development. They really do not have any time for unification. |
|  | Unification is kind of a long story, and the more North Korea make provocations and launch missile test, the less they have interest in unification. They see North Korea as ... they do not see North Korea as a partner to working with in the future. |
|  | So, from that aspect, the previous Park administration tried to create the narrative that unification is not a bad thing. Unification can be a bonanza or [inaudible 00:36:03]. So, it was a narrative. Usually it worked a little bit well in the first two years, before North Korea testing ... North Korea nuclear test. But, after that, the North Korea policy has been dramatically changed to a more [inaudible 00:36:23] South Korea, so the narrative has been kind of faded away. |
|  | But, this Moon Jae-In administration's is not like create that kind of narrative, but at the same time, but more directly look at the reality that this is the reality, but we have a willingness to improve the relationship. This improvement will pave the way for peaceful unifications. Unification, as we already know, that it will be another kind of opportunity to make South Korea much stronger, and much bigger country in North East Asia. So, we know that, but we just need to create more willingness and raise awareness one more time, I guess. |
| James Person: | One of the challenges to really assessing just how much unification would cost is the inability to really find out just what is going on inside North Korea. What conditions are actually like. We don't have the most reliable data from the North Koreans. And again, we can't get in there and assess the costs of unification. There were efforts, starting with President Lee, to create a unification tax, and to start preparing for this, because they do recognize that the cost is going to be enormous. Nothing like with East and West Germany, where you were dealing with two strong ... East Germany wasn't a complete basket case. They do recognize it can be challenging, but we just don't know exactly how much it is. |
| Kuyoun Chung: | I want to add more something. So, that's why President Park actually create this North East Asia fund, Which is connected to AAIB. AAIB does not really cover North East Asian regions, so President Park, our previous administration, suggested that it might be helpful to create some kind of pooled fund to gather fund from regional countries and prepare for the unification cases, but that has been dissipated after the nuclear test. |
| David Denoon: | Here. Lady. Wait for the mic please. |
| Yolanda: | Hello. My name is Yolanda [Bereros 00:38:41]. So, this begs the question. What do each of you consider to be the benefits of unification given these huge costs? |
| David Denoon: | Steve? Do you want ... |
| Stephen Noerper: | The benefit of unification is peace and stability for North East Asia, which as it stands now, is the most economically dynamic, and in some aspects, most politically significant part of our globe right now. And certainly among the leaders on that. |
|  | Peace and prosperity for the Korean people, and the historic reality of the division of this last century needs to be rectified. There is a moral duty, and a moral sensibility to see a unified Korean Peninsula. And it's the desire of the Korean people. Obviously, and one needs to stand near the DMZ or to talk to older Koreans who have borne division and what that has meant, and then one has an understanding, really, of a nation divided, and the emotive nature of this. |
|  | We, in the international community, owe our thought and our support for that process, just, whatever the expense will be, and to try to find a way to facilitate that, most likely on Seoul's terms, but certainly, while it's a Korean solution for a Korean divide, the international community can be of tremendous support. |
| James Person: | I can't say it any better. I agree 100%. |
| Kuyoun Chung: | Actually, unification will provide a huge benefit to all the North East Asian countries. Because of North Korea's consistent nuclear tests and ballistic missile tests, the region nearby, like far-eastern Russia, and northeast side of China has been less developed. Nobody wants to live there, nobody wants to start a business in that area because of that North Korea risk. |
|  | South Korea, to mediate that kind of risk, has been suggesting, on a number of economic initiatives. The last administration has suggested Eurasia initiative which connects South Korea to Europe from railroad and other natural resource connections, and that will kind of create another boost to economically revive and North East Asia regions. This Moon Jae-In also has similar idea. There should be some kind of connection from South Korea, North Korea, Russia, and China to Europe, in the end. |
|  | So, that kind of connection has been blocked by North Korea. So, unification will provide that kind of economic revivement, at the same time more stable security relationship. |
| David Denoon: | Okay. Here, near the door. |
| Fernando: | Hi, my name is Fernando [Braga 00:41:41]. My question is about voices within China that are more aggressive in terms of thinking about the idea of reunification, and the possibility that a regime that is hostile to China, and there was a United States Institute of Peace brief last month, discussing the idea that China might install, prevent reunification and install a Chinese-friendly government that is not the Kim Jong-Un regime. Could you just talk about that roadblock to reunification? Thank you. |
| James Person: | Certainly, you do hear scholars, for example, giving talks about the relationship with North Korea. For example [inaudible 00:42:37] of East China University suggesting that, in fact, South Korea's the better ally. The problem with this scenario of China installing a new leader is how the North Korean people would perceive this, and how those who are not Kim Jong-Un in leadership circles, how they would perceive this. |
|  | I have to tell you, again, as a historian having looked at documents from former Communist archives for a very long time, I can tell you there is a profound sense of mistrust that is just throughout the North Korean people toward China, and this perception that China has been overly interventionist. If we had the time, I'd go through this long list of events or incidents when China did directly meddle in North Korean affairs. Beyond that, there's this perception in North Korea that China has never really abandoned this Middle Kingdom mentality and has always treated it as the vassal state. Something that the rest of the region is now beginning to experience. |
|  | The North Koreans have been dealing with this for nearly six decades now. So, that sense of mistrust, which, again is throughout the North Korean leadership, with the exception of, perhaps, the uncle who was killed in 2013, which, I think, likely brought an end to any people in the leadership who were in support of improving relations, and developing those ties with China. You know, I just don't see that the North Koreans themselves would stand for China's intervention, and I don't think we should, either, for that matter. |
|  | I think the Korean people, the people of South Korea should be in the driver's seat on this, and working together to find a solution. It's not for China and the United States to determine the future of the Korean Peninsula. |
| David Denoon: | Over here. In the middle, The man in the dark suit. |
| Joe: | Hi. Joe Lofredo from China Merchant's Bank. As a representative of a Chinese bank, I have an interesting perspective on this. Just, Chinese have voted for two of the resolutions, and I can tell you from the inside, the Chinese banks, especially the major ones that are operating in the United States, are taking this very, very seriously. They're trying to pierce through the web of all the front companies, the shell companies, to try to root out financial transactions with North Korea. I just want to get your perspective as to whether this is going to be effective, and how North Korea is going to finance itself. The reality is, is that China has been the biggest trading partner. If that disappears, where does the money come from, and what are the implications? |
| James Person: | Certainly there is an ongoing effort, and I have no doubt that China is going to continue this, but there will be cosmetic efforts to deal with the North Koreans. But, I don't think that China will ever do enough to bring North Korea to its knees, which is essentially what we want them to do. We want the North Koreans to be convinced that the cost of their nuclear program is just too high, and that they have to return to the negotiating table to abandon this. It is not in China's broader interests to do this, to carry the water for the United States. The Chinese, again, just don't want ... they want that buffer zone. They don't like a nuclear North Korea, but they don't want to lose that strategic buffer zone that North Korea provides. I just, I don't ... I just cannot be convinced that China is ever going to do enough to bring North Korea to its knees, and to convince it that it needs to abandon its nuclear program, which, for the North Koreans, is non-negotiable. |
|  | Again, going back to the 60s, they've seen this as a vital component to their national security policy. It took them a long time to actually develop it. But, for them, there is a credible defensive rationale to this program. |
| Stephen Noerper: | Just, very quickly, in addition. There is no love lost right now between Beijing and Pyongyang. We need to understand that, because the US expectation is that that's how this problem will be solved. That's not a good read on our part. The fact of the matter is, Chinese banks are avoiding it. Chinese trading organizations are avoiding North Korea. They don't want to run afoul of the US Treasury. |
|  | They have considered North Korea irritants for a long time, but there is no affection for this young leader. You can couch it in lots of different analyses, but this [princeling 00:48:20] is not one in favor. So, they do have an ability to control that, and James' argument is spot-on in terms of their not wanting to leverage to a point of instability. |
|  | But, they're growingly disillusioned, and they're also very concerned about this missile and nuclear technology. They just don't say so publicly. It puts a lot of China at risk, in the event of some sort of miscalculation or tumult or political instability, and I've heard that from PLA (People's Liberation Army) military intelligence analysts. They would never say this publicly, but they're absolutely concerned about what it means. And now, with the high yields of this latest nuclear tests, what the meant in terms of earthquakes being felt within China, and whatever compromises had been done in terms of the geology of that area, it's something we should be concerned about. Of course, mention of an atmospheric test, that doesn't make China happy either. |
| David Denoon: | There is a man over here in a light suit. In the middle. It looks light to me. |
| Tad: | Okay. Tad Ogden here. Tell me, is there any, well, what I would call, historic, ethnic or political division between North and South Korea that's underlying this, that keeps them apart? |
| James Person: | There is no historical justification for the division between the North and South. It is, the Korean Peninsula has been a unified state for at least a thousand years. Again, it was divided because of the decision, in 1945, to temporarily divide. But, growing tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union led to a permanent division of the state when the joint Soviet-US committee could not agree on who would constitute a provisional government for Korea, and as a result of the emerging Cold War conflict, the peninsula was divided. Again, there is no historical justification for this. |
| Stephen Noerper: | But there are strong regionalisms that do go back a long period, and those are within South Korea and within North Korea, and clearly will be an aspect of a united peninsula. |
| David Denoon: | I think we have time for one more question. In the far back. |
| Sun: | Thanks. My name is Sun Yu. I am a Korean living in the US. So, there is a long history of discussion for the reunification since 1945. But, at this point, nuclear-armed North Korea became a reality. That's another topic, but I wonder if it is ... fundamentally changes the proposition of this talk of reunification. Whether it is a still useful framework to bring about the engaging North and South and interested nations otherwise. Is it not more useful to ... more focus about the peaceful coexistence of two different states? |
| Kuyoun Chung: | Well, at this moment, actually, unification is not a kind of [inaudible 00:52:06] dialogue between two Koreas. Not only two Koreas, but overall in international community, because North Korea is not interested in dialogue in the first place, for de-nuclearization. |
|  | At the same time, North Korea is not interested in unification from South Korea's terms, which is based on National Community Reunification Formula, because accepting that formula, a gradual three stages, functionalist formula means that they have to change their system in a democratic way. Because our way is about making a democratic, peaceful country by unified by more peaceful way. Their way is not necessarily conceived. The ultimate end state of unified Korea is democratic countries. As I said, they want survival of their regime. Their regime is not democratic. |
| David Denoon: | I think we should wrap up and give adequate time for the second panel. Would any of the panelists like to make any summary comments. Steve? |
| Stephen Noerper: | I just wanted to point out something that was mentioned early, but it's another takeaway. Things that aren't oft-reported. Generational change. Keep your eye on what's happening. The new generations of South Koreans have different expectations, different concerns. They tend to be jobs, they tend to be pocketbook issues. They're concerned about their future. North Korea, to them, on the ground in South Korea, is a very distant concern. They view it as much more remote country cousins. To add to that, North Korean millennials. There is a new generation of North Koreans. They did not know Kim Il-Sung. Some of them did not know Kim Jong-Il. They have different levels of expectation. They want cell phones, even if it's an intranet. They want luxury goods. They may have rising expectations over time, or different expectations. So, keeping a focus on generational change is something that we don't often talk about, but it's really important for transition on the peninsula, and ultimately, unification. |
| Kuyoun Chung: | I just want to add, that, for the next panel, we're going to discuss more about nuclear issues more, and security issues as well. South Korean's point of view is that how we resolve this nuclear issues will determine how we will reach the unification process. Because, that is actually about the starting point of reconciliation in the first place. I hope the next panel will be more productive as well. |
| David Denoon: | Good. Can we thank our panelists? |